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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 11/02/07

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3) Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei)

Prime Minister's schedule, Nov. 1

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)

November 2, 2007

09:55

Met with Health Minister Masuzoe at Kantei. Afterwards, met with Cabinet Special Advisor Kurokawa.

11:03

Met with Deputy Foreign Minister Kono.

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12:58

Attended a memorial service for police officers who died in line of duty across the country and people who died when they cooperated with the police at Grand Arc Hanzomon Hotel.

14:25

Met with Deputy Prime Minister of Qatar al-Atiyah at Kantei.

15:00

Met with Lower House member Shinya Ono. Later, met with Natural Resources and Energy Agency Director-General Mochizuki.

16:03

Met with Minister of State for People's Life Kishida. After him, met with Kyodo News Agency's Editorial Bureau Director-General Shuichi Ito. Later, met with former LDP Secretary General Nakagawa.

17:03

Met with Minister of Internal Affairs Masuda and Kunihiro Matsuo, chair of the Verification Committee on Pension Records.

17:28

Attended a get-together of the Female Lawmakers' Policy Research Council held at LDP headquarters.

18:01

Attended a session of the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy held at Kantei.

20:17

Dined with National Defense Academy President Makoto Iokibe and former Prime Ministerial Advisor Yukio Okamoto at the Japanese restaurant Yamazato at Hotel Okura.

22:39

Arrived at his private residence in Nozawa.

4) Prime Minister's statement on Antiterrorism Special Measures Law being no longer in effect (Mainichi)

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)

November 2, 2007

The following is the complete text of a statement released by Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda accompanying the expiration of the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law:

Today, the government, accompanying the expiration of the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law, brought to an end the supplying operations and other activities of the Maritime Self-Defense Force in the Indian Ocean. These operations were carried out with the cooperation and understanding of everyone in this nation, and for

this, I once more express my appreciation. I also would like to express my appreciation for the efforts of the Self-Defense Forces personnel who carried out these operations steadily and methodically in a difficult work environment.

However, the war on terror by the international community is not over. Close to 3,000 persons were victims of the 9-11 terrorist attacks, and 24 Japanese were among them. The reality is that this threat has still not been eliminated. Terrorism is a challenge to

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free and open societies. The war on terror is connected to the national interests of Japan. That is why our country bore a part of the effort through supplying activities. These operations must be quickly restarted.

The core of the various efforts of the international community in the war on terror is to make sure that Afghanistan does not again become a hotbed for terrorism. In the area of social and reconstruction assistance, our country has provided over 140 billion yen in aid, and has become the number 2 aid donor (for that country) in the world. In the future, as well, the government will closely cooperate with the international community and continue to provide reconstruction assistance.

However, the elimination of terrorism cannot be done by reconstruction assistance alone. Through mop up operations against terrorists and measures to maintain public security, such assistance will bear fruit. Over 40 countries are continuing to carry out operations in Afghanistan with strong perseverance in order to recover public security, although there have been noble sacrifices. The maritime interdiction operation (MIO), an element of such efforts, deters terrorists from operating in the Indian Ocean. Supplying operations, which tap the experience and capability of the Self-Defense Forces, have become fixed as an important base for MIO. The operations were highly evaluated in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1776, and strong expectations for the operations to be continued have come from every country. At the same time, they contribute to the maritime navigation security of the Indian Ocean, which is vital to our country.

In order to Japan to carry out its responsibility in solidarity with the international community to root out terrorism, the supply operations must be continued. The government will do its utmost to swiftly enact the new antiterrorism special measures bill so that the refueling supplying operations can be quickly resumed, with the understanding and cooperation of everybody in this nation, through such means as enhancing the transparency of those operations.

5) MSDF withdraws from Indian Ocean, winding up antiterrorism refueling operation; Special measures law expires; Fukuda-Ozawa meeting today

YOMIURI (Top play) (Excerpts)
November 2, 2007

Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba ordered yesterday the Maritime Self-Defense Force supply ship Tokiwa and the destroyer Kirisame to wind up their refueling operation in the Indian Ocean and head home timed with the expiration of the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law. Aimed at an early resumption of the MSDF operation, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda (concurrently president of the Liberal Democratic Party), during his party-head talks today with Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) President Ichiro Ozawa, is expected to ask for cooperation for the enactment of new antiterrorism legislation. The prime minister also intends to call for establishing a framework for talks between the ruling and opposition camps regarding important policy. Subjects being considered include the establishment of a permanent law governing the overseas dispatch of the SDF and tax and pension affairs.

The two MSDF vessels departed from the Indian Ocean at midnight of Nov. 1. They will return home in three weeks. At 1:30 p.m. on Nov. 1

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(6:30 p.m., Nov. 1, Japan time), on the Tokiwa, Defense Minister Ishiba's video message was run in which he said: "Performing duties in a severe environment is never easy. I know that your duties entailed difficulties beyond description." The MSDF's refueling operation of six years that started in December 2001 has now been put to a halt. The Air Self-Defense Force's airlift mission between US Yokota Air Base (in Tokyo) and Kadena Air Base (Okinawa) also ended yesterday.

Prime Minister Fukuda yesterday released a statement saying: "In order for Japan to fulfill its responsibility for eradicating terrorism, continuing activities is essential. I will make utmost efforts for the swift enactment of new antiterrorism legislation."

He is also scheduled to have a second meeting with DPJ head Ozawa for about two hours from 3:00 p.m. today, following the one on Oct. 130.

6) US, British vessels need to fill gap left by MSDF to maintain effectiveness of MIO

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
November 2, 2007

The Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) supply ships provided refueling service to American and British warships engaged in maritime intercept operations (MIO) in the Indian Ocean. Japan's participation in MIO, which aims at preventing terrorists and weapons from entering or departing Afghanistan, was highly appreciated, as shown by this comment: "Owing to Japan's refueling service, it was possible to watch moves in the boundless Indian Ocean on 24-hour basis." Given this situation, there is concern in Japan about the negative impact of the MSDF's withdrawal from the Indian Ocean.

In a meeting of the House of Representatives' special committee on antiterrorism and Iraq support yesterday, Foreign Minister Koumura said: "The efficiency of MIO might be undermined. In particular, other countries will have to provide the operation done by Japan in order to enable Pakistan to continue its current mission."

Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba said: "The suspension of Japan's operation will not lead to diminishing the deterrence capability of MIO." But this view is premised on a case in which the US and other countries fill the gap left by the MSDF's withdrawal. Some persons suggest that: (1) participating countries should increase the number of their warships; (2) The American and British militaries should provide other countries with replenishment tankers; and (3) the strategic zone should be narrowed.

7) MSDF-refueled vessel allowed to concurrently serve in Iraq operation, says Machimura

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
November 2, 2007

Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura in a meeting yesterday of the House of Representatives Special Committee on Prevention of Terrorism indicated that there would be no problem for a foreign vessel refueled by the Maritime Self-Defense Force to temporarily engage in operations in Iraq when it is on both the maritime interdiction operation (MIO) and the Iraq operation. Social

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Democratic Party lawmaker Kiyomi Tsujimoto asked, "Is an MSDF-refueled vessel allowed to engage in MIO after going to Iraq?" In response, Machimura said, "Such is allowed as long as (Japanese oil) is used for the MIO."

8) MSDF pullout: Views from opinion leaders

NIKKEI (Page 3) (Full)
November 2, 2007

Okamoto: Consider joining ISAF in Afghanistan

Yukio Okamoto, formerly a special advisor to the prime minister, commented: "The Maritime Self-Defense Force's withdrawal means Japan has dropped out from the international team fighting terrorists. Since the Gulf War, Japan has made international contributions. However, Japan will now have to start all over again from scratch. Japan should continue to explore ways to join the activities in Afghanistan. That's important for Japan in its ties with the international community. The government should do its utmost efforts to continue refueling activities. However, if there's no way in the end, then the prime minister-in response to Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) President Ichiro Ozawa's proposal-should also think about participating in the form of sending personnel to ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) headquarters or cooperating in the area of transportation."

Soeya: Discuss Japan's int'l role

Yoshihide Soeya, a professor at Keio University, commented: "The MSDF's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean has allowed Japan to play a role, making an international contribution, even though there are constitutional and other constraints. In other words, Japan cannot do nothing much to begin with. Under such a condition, Japan has conducted refueling activities there. Even after Japan has called off its refueling activities, no harm will come to its foreign policy, including Japan-US relations. On this occasion, the ruling and opposition parties should hold discussions in an explicit way about how Japan should contribute to international security. That's an important challenge. That includes discussing the idea of creating a permanent law that allows Japan to send the Self-Defense Forces overseas whenever it is necessary to do so."

9) Japan concerned about possible decline in international confidence in wake of ending six years of refueling services

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
November 2, 2007

Yuji Nishikawa, Tetsuya Furuta

With the expiration yesterday of the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law, Japan halted its Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) refueling mission in the Indian Ocean. The refueling operations started in 2001, and over the six years since, Japan refueled other countries' vessels a total of 794 times. The Tokyo Shimbun probed into the role Japan had played through the mission in terms of preventing the proliferation of terrorism and in view of international contributions, and also into what impact the suspension of the mission would have.

Aiming to continue the refueling operations, the government

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submitted new antiterrorism special measures legislation to the current session of the Diet. Debate on the new bill is held every day at the Lower House Special Committee on Prevention of Terrorism.

In the debate, the opposition bloc is repeatedly pursuing the "results" of the past operations. The opposition bloc's thinking is that the results of the past refueling services for other countries' vessels participating in the maritime interdiction operations (MIO) are the conditions for Japan to continue the mission.

Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura emphasized an aspect of deterrence against terrorism in answering in a session of the Lower House special committee this way: "The major result is that (the mission) has prevented the Indian Ocean from turning into a sea of terrorists."

The government has publicized the number of the MSDF's refueling of other countries' vessels and the amount of oil provided by the MSDF to those vessels, but when it comes to the results in terms of preventing terrorism, what the government has disclosed to date have been limited to a dozen specific cases shown by the United States and other countries participating in MIO and the total amount of

narcotics and weapons seized. The government has not made clear any data indicating a total number of detained people affiliated with terrorist organizations.

In addition, the amount of oil provided by the MSDF to other countries' vessels sharply dropped to 14,000 gallons this year from a peak of some 175,000 gallons in 2002. As far as this figure is concerned, the need for refueling seems to be declining.

Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba explained in this regard: "It's difficult to explain deterrence by using numbers." Koumura insisted, "(The halt to the refueling operations) would undermine the efficiency of MIO." But it is still unclear what impact of the suspension of the refueling mission will have on the war on terrorism in specific terms.

Meanwhile, Koumura stressed the result of the refueling mission on the diplomatic front, noting, "The mission has been highly appreciated by other countries. It is a tangible human contribution."

The government has noted that the Japan-US alliance will not cool down immediately by the suspension of the refueling mission with a senior Foreign Ministry official saying, "The US has understood the political situation in Japan." The government wants to obtain other countries' understanding by indicating it is making efforts to resume the mission as quickly as possible.

However, the suspension of the mission may be protracted as there is no prospect at present for the new legislation to be enacted into law.

At a session yesterday of the Lower House special committee, Koumura emphasized the need to enact the new legislation swiftly by saying: "We must not bring international confidence in Japan to nothing. If we did so, Japan would be taken by other countries as a country that is unwilling to fight against terrorism."

10) LDP hopes for resumption of MSDF mission, while DPJ afraid of
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criticism as Fukuda-Ozawa talks resume

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
November 2, 2007

The Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean, based on the Antiterrorism Measures Law, was called off Nov. 1 due to the expiration of the law. In connection with the MSDF pullout, the ruling parties yesterday expressed their hopes for an early resumption of the refueling operation, while the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) emphasized that the government and ruling coalition were to blame for the law's expiration. The reality is however that the two parties are quietly watching from afar the result of the second meeting between Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa scheduled for today.

In a meeting yesterday of his faction, Taku Yamasaki, former LDP vice president, revealed his view that the ruling coalition would be able to put a new antiterrorism special measures bill to a second vote at the House of Representatives (in a bid to enact it) after the DPJ voted down the new legislation at the House of Councillors. He said: "I think (the new antiterrorism bill) would be passed by a two-thirds lower chamber overriding vote." His remark is the expression of his hope that the DPJ would tacitly approve of taking a second vote in the Lower House in the wake of the first Fukuda-Ozawa meeting. He did not give any reason for his expectations. LDP Secretary General Bunmei Ibuki again sought to constrain the DPJ in a meeting yesterday at party headquarters.

The largest opposition party has yet to reach a consensus on how to respond to the matter. Deputy President Naoto Kan stressed in a press conference yesterday: "I want you to understand that the government and ruling camp did nothing (to pass the bill earlier)."

The DPJ was concerned that the public might criticize the party over the MSDF pullout after the media report the scenes MSDF ships are leaving from the Indian Ocean. However, the standoff mood between the two parties has been eased after the Fukuda-Ozawa meeting on Oct. 30. A mid-level DPJ member said: "The best strategy is to run away." The main opposition party is trying to make its responsibility vague for its opposition that led to the MSDF pullout by taking advantage of the government and ruling coalition, which have not taken a resolute stance toward the enactment of the new antiterrorism bill.

11) Government to strengthen assistance for Afghanistan

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)

November 2, 2007

The government decided yesterday to extend new economic assistance to Afghanistan and Pakistan as part of its international contribution in support of the war on terror. It plans to incorporate the amount of aid in a supplementary budget for fiscal 2007. With the expiration of the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law, Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) ships today began pulling out of the Indian Ocean. Japan has now suspended its personnel contribution to the campaign to eliminate terrorist forces in and around Afghanistan. The government has decided, therefore, to increase economic aid to the two countries.

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12) Japan to include budget for additional assistance to Afghanistan in supplementary budget bill

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)

November 2, 2007

The government's Council of Overseas Economic Cooperation held a meeting yesterday at the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei). Joining the meeting were relevant cabinet members, including Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura and Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura. In the session, they decided to include a set of additional humanitarian and reconstruction measures for Afghanistan in a 2007 supplementary budget bill.

This decision came in response to the halt to the Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) refueling operations in the Indian Ocean. Areas to be covered by the set of those measures include vocational training for Afghan refugees who returned home from Iran and Pakistan, improvement in public order, and education. Specifics will be further discussed in the days ahead.

So far the Japanese government has implemented a set of assistance measures for Afghanistan worth 140 billion yen. The government has already decided to offer additional assistance worth 24 billion yen. It intends to secure a portion of that amount in a 2007 supplementary budget bill and to get the bill adopted in the ordinary session of the Diet slated for next year.

13) DPJ calls for summoning Yamada Corp. president as sworn witness

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)

November 2, 2007/11/02

In a meeting yesterday of the House of Councillors' foreign and defense affairs committees, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) renewed its call for summoning Yamada Corp. President Yoshihiko Yonezu to the Diet as a sworn witness over the CX engine scandal involving former Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya. Since the ruling camp withheld a reply, this issue will be discussed again in a meeting today. To realize a summons to a witness, the rule of unanimity is adopted. The DPJ, however, aims to summon the president to the current Diet session, so the main opposition party might adopt the principle of majority rule in the meeting today.

14) Former Yamada Yoko executive director treated former Upper House member, then ASDF lieutenant general, with more than 10 tennis tours

SANKEI (Top Play)
November 2, 2007

In connection with the issue of Motonobu Miyazaki (69), former executive director of Yamada Yoko, a trading house specializing in defense procurement, having treated former Administrative Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya (63) with free rounds of golf, it was also found yesterday through the company's in-house investigation that Yamada Yoko treated former Upper House member Hideaki Tamura (75), who was then commandant of the Air Staff College, with free tennis tours at least more than 10 times between 1986-1987. A company employee booked hotels with tennis courts for Tamura at the order of Miyazaki and the company paid the full amounts of his hotel bills. Regarding this, Tamura refused to make a

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reply, noting through his secretary that he cannot respond to any requests for an interview.

According to more than one source connected with Yamada Yoko, Tamura went on an overnight tennis tour about once or twice a month for about two years starting around 1986. He stayed at Sengokubara Prince Hotel (management right transferred in 2004) in Hakone Town, Kanagawa Prefecture, which has tennis courts. He mostly stayed there overnight on weekends.

An employee in charge booked the hotel and a tennis court when Miyazaki gave him Tamura's schedule.

Yamada Yoko paid a bill including hotel, meal and tennis court fees for two persons, each time it was sent to it from the hotel. Some billing statements allegedly included amounts of the purchases of tennis goods. The amount the company paid for one tour way exceeded 10,000 yen.

Employees of Yamada Yoko, including Miyazaki, never joined Tamura's tennis tours.

Tamura retired from the college in January 1989. He ran for the Upper House election in July the same year and was elected for the first time. Yamada Yoko stopped paying bills for Tamura's tennis tours around 1987 in the run-up to Tamura's going into politics.

15) GE suspends agent contract with Nihon Mirise Corp.

NIKKEI (Page 43) (Full)
November 2, 2007

A former managing director of Yamada Yoko Corporation, a defense-related trading company, used to play golf with former Administrative Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya, 63, when Moriya was in office at the Defense Ministry. In connection with this problem, General Electric Co. (GE), a US corporation, revealed yesterday that it has suspended all of its business with Yamada Corp. and Nihon Mirise Corporation (NMC), which was established by the former Yamada Corp. executive. GE has also suspended its contract with NMC as an agent on the engine for the Air Self-Defense Force's follow-on cargo aircraft (CX).

GE notified Yamada Corp. and NMC on Oct. 31 of its decision to suspend business with the two companies. GE says it has yet to decide on when to resume business with the two companies.

Moriya was summoned to the Diet on Oct. 29 as a sworn witness. In his testimony there, Moriya stated that he used to play golf with Motonobu Miyazaki, 69, formerly a managing director at Yamada Corp., and used to be dined and wined by the former executive even after April 2000 when the Defense Ministry renewed its code of ethics for personnel in the Self-Defense Forces to prohibit them from receiving any kind of services from contractors. The former executive is now certain to have been involved in a violation of the SDF ethical code. GE therefore decided to withhold itself from doing business with Yamada Corp. and NMC, which is headed by the former executive.

16) Second Fukuda-Ozawa talks today; Ozawa denies LDP-DPJ grand

coalition; Some members in both parties concerned about rapprochement

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MAINICHI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
November 2, 2007

The second meeting between Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Ichiro Ozawa, president of the largest opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) will be held this afternoon. However, some members in the ruling and opposition camps are wary about rapprochement between the two party leaders. Attention is now focused on whether Ozawa will lean toward a dialogue-oriented policy or whether the two leaders will discuss a Diet session extension as the current session is set to expire on Nov. 10.

Since the two held their first meeting, calls for dialogue have been raised in the DPJ. In the city of Utsunomiya yesterday, Ozawa denied the possibility of forming a grand coalition between the LDP and DPJ, saying, "I have no intention." He stressed that his target was to assume the reins of government in the next House of Representatives election. "Since I received a strong request (from the prime minister for the meeting), I will meet him. We will not hold regular meetings. If nothing is produced in the meeting, there will be no meeting." He tamped down the cooperative mood.

17) Prime minister, Ozawa positive about holding talks on permanent law on dispatch of SDF troops abroad: They meet again today

MAINICHI (Top Play) (Excerpts)
November 2, 2007

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda yesterday took a positive stance toward the possibility of establishing a permanent law, instead of a law with a limited period of validity like the Anti-terrorism Special Measures Law, which expired on Nov. 1. He said, "If the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) agrees, we will consult with the New Komeito and decide whether to submit (such a bill) to the Diet." DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa also told reporters the same day, "If the government and the DPJ agree with our view, based on appropriate ideals and principles, we would be able to hold talks anytime." There has now appeared the possibility of the enactment of permanent legislation allowing Self-Defense Force (SDF) personnel overseas paving the way for the LDP and the DPJ to find common ground. The second round of Fukuda-Ozawa talks will be noted with attention.

Responding at the Kantei to questions from reporters on the envisaged permanent law, Fukuda explained, "The idea has been around for some time that it would be better to pass a law that allows SDF personnel to engage in operations under any circumstances, instead of creating a law that can only be applied when it becomes necessary for Japan to extend international cooperation." He added, "If the DPJ agrees, we will consult with it on the matter."

In the meantime, Ozawa held a press conference in Utsunomiya in which he revealed his readiness to respond to talks if the aim was to lay down general principles for the overseas dispatch of SDF personnel under a permanent law. He said, "My long-cherished position is to create a basic law for international contributions and to help secure and maintain peace. I am against the present dispatch of SDF troops, because the government and the ruling parties have no principles for doing that."

18) Abduction league delegation to visit US

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YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
November 2, 2007

A delegation of the parliamentary league on the abduction issue, chaired by former Economy, Trade, and Industry Minister Takeo

Hiranuma, will visit the United States from Nov. 14. In the planned talks with persons connected with the US Congress, the Hiranuma-led group of eight lawmakers from the Liberal Democratic Party, Democratic Party of Japan, and New Komeito plans to ask for cooperation for a settlement of the abduction issue and other matters.

19) Policy switch to attach importance to consumers: Prime minister orders reviews of all policies

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
November 2, 2007

Prime Minister Fukuda yesterday called in State Minister for People's Life Kishida to the Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei) and ordered him to review all policies, laws and ordinances from a perspective of attaching importance to consumers. Following a series of food-labeling scams, false earthquake-resistance calculations and the drug-induced hepatitis case, he wants to switch his administration's basic policy from attaching importance to producers to laying emphasis on consumers. However, since such a policy shift requires a change in the awareness of government agencies, whether the government can come up with effective measures will depend on the prime minister's leadership.

The prime minister ordered Kishida to check the policies, laws and ordinances of all government agencies from the perspective of eating, working, making things, protecting, and living. Kishida will sort out measures adopted by all government agencies and listen to views of experts, and then report the results to the prime minister. Regarding proposals that will require legal amendments, bills amending relevant laws will be submitted to the regular session of the Diet next year.

Major items up for revisions include appropriate labeling of the quality of commercial goods, disclosure of information on pharmaceuticals, monitoring imported foods, prevention of illegal business practices targeting elderly people, employment measures mainly for so-called freeters (job-hopping part-time workers) and public security measures for local communities.

The prime minister in his policy speech declared that the time has come when importance must be attached to the safety and peace of mind of the public instead of the thinking that emphasis must be attached to producers, based on the reflection that the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was harshly defeated by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which advocated highest priority to people's lives. He has repeatedly held study meetings with his aides with the determination that he would fundamentally change the stance of government offices, which consider policies for the convenience of producers, as an aide to the prime minister put it.

However, since it is a grand plan to take a second look at all policies from the standpoint of consumers, some are concerned that the themes are so wide-ranging it is questionable whether bureaucrats affected by the thinking of producers can come up with good proposals, as a senior Cabinet Office official put it. Some

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also take the view that the government agencies will not move unless concrete themes are set and they are pressed to change their concepts, as a senior government official said.

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